

## LOOKING AT LIBRARY USABILITY: MATCHING THE CONCEPT FROM USER'S EXPERIENCES

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined user's current experiences about the usability of the libraries. Their views about the usability of the libraries may play an important role in the success of learning in general. Thus, this paper focuses on current views that reveal what users believe about the usability of existing libraries services and facilities offered. Historically, the quality of the library services have been described in terms of its collection and measured by the size of the library's holding and various counts of its use. This traditional orientation no longer offers attainable goals for addressing successfully the community's demands for information. Identifying new ways to conceive of quality and to monitor its attainment are current challenges for us as an academic library. While the business world has made great strides in focusing on customer service by studying customers' needs and behaviors, libraries have tended to structure their holdings and services around what they believed was good for their customers or users. A syndrome named "librarians know best" required the librarians to transform the institution to a user-focused library. We are doing a survey by asking our users what they need and by listening carefully to what they say. Also continuously, monitoring what we are doing and asking what we could be doing better. The most important change we are making in our behavior is to evaluate our activities through our user's eyes and ask ourselves what effect our actions will have on customer service and satisfaction.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Usability, academic library, customer service, librarian, user's satisfaction*

## INTRODUCTION

As the needs and expectations of library users' change in the digital environment, libraries are trying to find and match the best channels to define their user communities, understand what they value and evolve in collections, services and facilities to meet their demands. In part, this effort requires a closer look at how library users use and respond to the library collection, services and facilities provided.

To describe and learn from the user experiences, the Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak undertook an online survey of its users. This online survey was carried out from Feb until April 2012. The survey was to get feedbacks from users' perspective on the services and facilities provided by CAIS. 277 responses were received.

The survey comprised:

- Total Completed Survey Received: 227
- Total Incomplete Survey Received: 56
- 2 sections:
  - Demographic – 3 questions
  - Users' Perspective – 23 questions inclusive of 3 questions that required user's comment

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the survey are to investigate whether users are satisfied with the services and facilities offered by the Centre and to identify user's current trend toward library as the most relevance and referred resources. The inputs received will be analyzed and become a blueprint for our future planning.

## **WHY DO WE CONDUCT SURVEYS?**

Most of the libraries reported conducting surveys, primarily to identify trends, “take the temperature” of what was happening among their constituencies, or get a sense of their users’ perceptions of library resources. In summary, libraries have conducted surveys to assess the following:

- i. Patterns, frequency, ease and success of use
- ii. User needs, expectations, perspectives, priorities and preferences for library collections, services and facilities
- iii. User satisfaction with vendor products, library collections, services, staff and websites
- iv. Services quality
- v. Shifts in user attitude and opinion
- vi. Relevance of collections or services to the curriculum

The data gathered from surveys are used to inform decision making and strategic planning related to the allocation of financial and human resources and to the organization of library units. Survey data also serve political purposes. They are used in presentations to faculty senates, deans’ councils, and library advisory boards as a means to bolster support for changes in library practice. They are also used in grant proposals and other requests for funding.

## **LIBRARY RELEVANCY TO KEEP YOUR USERS LOYALTY**

Users or customers do not want more choices, but they want exactly what they want whether when, where, and how they want it and now the technology makes it possible for the libraries to give it to them. A library that aspires to give users exactly what they want must look at the world through new lenses or channels.

It must use technology to become two dimensions:

- i. a mass customizer services and facilities, and
- ii. a one-to-one information provider that elicits information from each user about their specific needs and preferences.

These approaches bind the organisation and user together in what we call a learning relationship, which mean an ongoing connection that becomes smarter as the two interact with each other, collaborating to meet the user's needs over time.

In learning relationships, individual users teach the organisation more and more their preferences and needs, giving the organisation an immense competitive advantage. The more users teach the organisation, the better it becomes at providing exactly what they want, exactly what they want and the more difficult it will be for others or similar organisation to entice them away. In these tougher challenges, libraries should prepare to manage their relevancy to keep the users forever exist.

## **MANAGING YOUR USERS NEED BASED ON RELATIONSHIPS**

If the libraries decide that their organisation can and should cultivate their relationships with users, how do they go about it? Basically there are two recommended initiatives:

- i. The Information Strategy – it does depend on the organisations or libraries ability to elicit and manage information about their users. A library may have to use one of two approaches to persuade them to identify and provide information about themselves. This is to show them that it can serve them better if they do or give them something of value in return, such as a gift or increase their needs. By retaining such information, a library becomes better equipped to respond to suggestions, resolve complaints and stay abreast of customers' changing needs. Based on this relationship the libraries can identify what really users need.
- ii. The Organizational Strategy – to do this, the libraries must know their customers' preferences and be able to help them articulate their needs. Among librarians should serve as gatekeepers within the organisation for all communication to and from each user. In addition, libraries need capability librarians, each of whom executes a distinct service or delivery process for fulfilling each user's requirements. The important of each capability ensures that appropriate capacity exists and that the process can be executed reliably and efficiently. For their part, the libraries must know what user required and be able to figure out how to create it.

Understanding and tracking this gap will enable the organisation to demonstrate the need for new capabilities and they need to decide how to expand or change their libraries capabilities.

## **MAKING LIBRARIES VISIBLE TO IT USERS**

The library's roles there are not at all clear, neither its relationships with users or with other information services. There is little information about how library users behave in a network environment, how they react to online library services, and how they combine those services with others such as search engines like Google or bookstores like Amazon. The libraries need to inform their development in a networked are. The goals of this process are:

- i. To develop a better understanding of methods effective in assessing use and usability of online scholarly information resources and information services.
- ii. To create a baseline understanding of users' needs to support strategic planning in an increasingly competitive environment for academic libraries and their parent institutions.

Most are still at a stage where limited experimentation is more that well-informed strategic planning. While libraries have excelled at assessing the development and use of their traditional collections and services, comparable assessments of online collections and services are more complicated and less well understood. By using and attach to the technology and network to make library visibly to the targeted community will enhance a better communication and exposing what libraries have to acknowledge to their users.

## LIBRARY USABILITY FROM USERS EXPERIENCES

A part of the findings from the conducted survey that might need on how library should initiate to increase their usability and relevancy from the collection, services and facilities provided.

### I use CAIS:

Weekly	116	52.49%
Daily	75	33.94%
At least one each half term	25	11.31%
Less than once a half term	5	2.26%
Never	0	0.00%

### I use the Centre for:

finding information for assignment	158	71.49%
borrowing books to read at home	145	65.61%
doing coursework/studying	141	63.81%
using the Internet/computers	133	60.18%
reading	122	55.20%
working with my friends	101	45.70%
attending events/activities	62	28.05%
reading newspapers/magazines	48	21.72%
finding information for hobbies or interests	47	21.26%

**The Centre's resources I most regularly use are:**

Online resources	155	. 70.14%
reference books	154	. 69.68%
the Internet	139	. 62.89%
fiction books	79	. 35.74%
non-fiction books	66	. 29.86%
newspapers/magazines	42	. 19.01%
other computer software	17	. 7.69%
video/audio tapes/CDs/DVDs	12	. 5.43%

**The age of books in the Centre is mostly:**

new	121	. 54.75%
old	85	. 38.46%
very new	8	. 3.62%
very old	7	. 3.17%

**The number of books in CAIS is:**

just enough	114	. 51.58%
too many	60	. 27.15%
too few	47	. 21.27%

**I borrow a book from the Centre:**

monthly	108	. 48.87%
weekly	74	. 33.48%
yearly	20	. 9.05%
never	13	. 5.88%
daily	6	. 2.71%

**I use books from the Centre for:**

coursework/ assignments	185	83.71%
leisure reading	100	45.25%
I don't borrow books from the library	8	3.62%

**When I use the Centre to help me with coursework/assignment, I find what I need:**

most of the time	123	55.66%
rarely	50	22.62%
always	47	21.27%
never	1	0.45%

**When I cannot find the information or books I need, it is most often because:**

the materials are already on loan	93	42.08%
I don't know where to look	59	26.69%
the Centre has nothing on my topic	52	23.53%
others (please explain)	13	5.88%

**If I cannot find what I want:**

I ask for help from the Librarian	133	60.18%
I find the information at home	86	38.91%
I give up	30	13.57%
I go to another library	21	9.51%



**When I need help using the Centre:**

I ask the librarian	165	74.66%
I ask a friend	138	62.44%
I use the guides/leaflets	68	30.77%
I ask a lecturer	31	14.03%
I give up	6	2.71%
I never need help using the Centre	5	2.26%

**Would you like more training in how to use the Centre?**

Yes	166	75.11%
No	55	24.89%

**When I need information for coursework/assignment, I most often use resources from:**

Google	183	82.81%
CAIS	177	80.09%
home	46	20.81%

**If CAIS is to shorten the opening hours, it would affect my study:**

a great deal	105	47.51%
somewhat	79	35.75%
not at all	37	16.74%

**When I choose a book to read for pleasure, it is most often from:**

CAIS	114	51.58%
home	51	23.08%
elsewhere (please say where)	32	14.48%
the public library	24	10.86%

**I would describe the Centre as:**

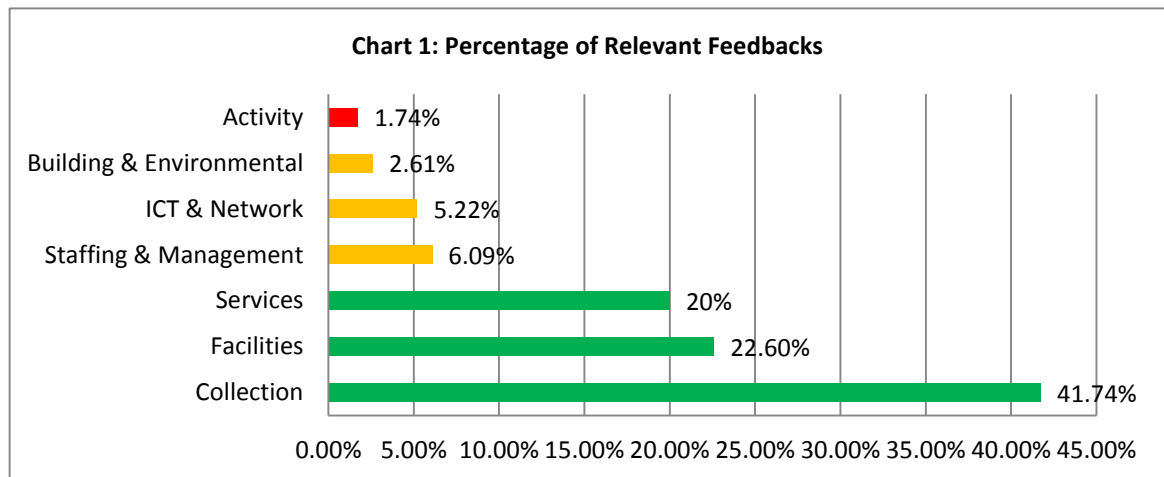
comfortable	175	79.19%
Welcoming	104	47.06%
quiet	99	44.79%
Safe	93	42.08%
fun	37	16.74%
orderly	34	15.38%
exciting	26	11.76%
Noisy	17	7.69%
boring	16	7.24%

**Please rate each of the following areas of the Centre**

**1star- poor, 2star- okay, 3star- good, 4star- very good**

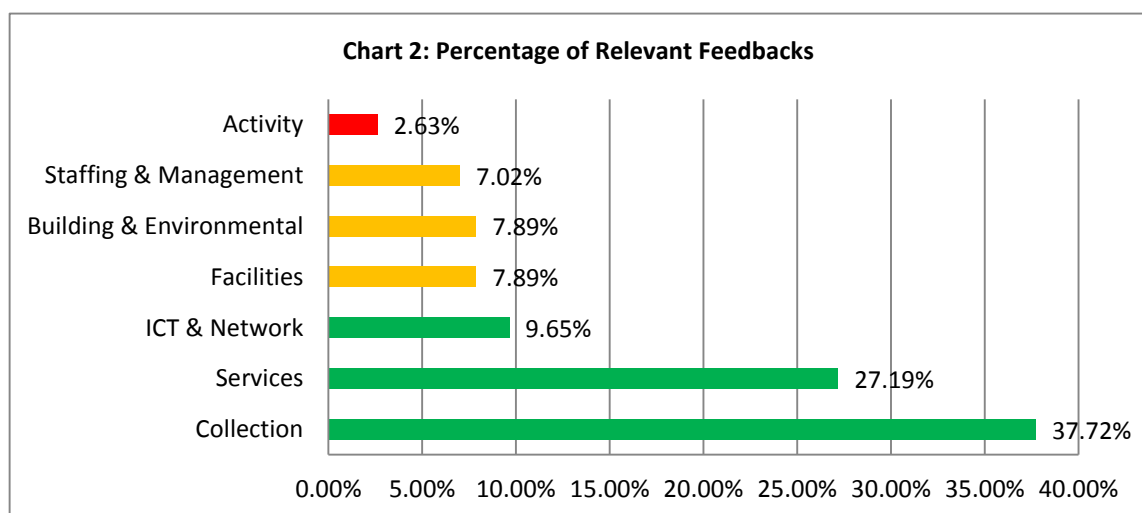
Areas	% *	% **	% ***	% ****
fiction	12.22%	34.39%	42.53%	10.86%
reference	4.07%	24.43%	48.42%	23.08%
reading area	5.88%	27.15%	39.37%	27.60%
computer laboratories	10.86%	35.29%	33.03%	20.81%
non-fiction	8.14%	38.91%	40.72%	12.22%
online databases/journals	8.60%	30.32%	35.75%	25.34%
study area	5.43%	26.70%	32.13%	35.75%
Media services	11.76%	34.39%	33.94%	19.91%

### The university Centre would be better if.....



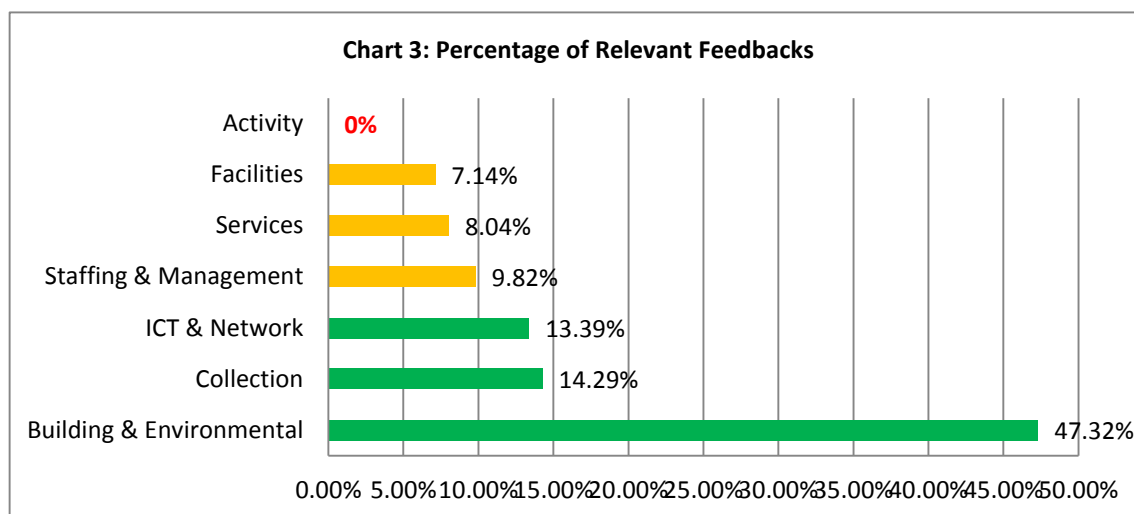
This chart show the percentage by categories of the feedbacks received from the respondents

### I would use the Centre more if.....



This chart show the percentage by categories of the feedbacks received from the respondents

## The best thing about the Centre is.....



This chart show the percentage by categories of the feedbacks received from the respondents

## CONCLUSION

This survey is conducted to see on how the Centre's achievement and performance from the users' evaluation and perspective. In future the Centre is taking steps to incorporate the suggestions received and improvements be made especially under those in lower percentage.

By asking the right questions whether the survey results are statistically reliable, representative, valid or significant, doesn't necessarily mean that they provide information that can be used to access and improve library service quality. At many large academic libraries, user communities are diverse and differ in their needs for library resources and services. Undergraduate students, based on their understanding or experience, may respond quite differently from others to some questions. It is also important to remember that users are just one method of acquiring user input. While surveys offer the prospect of obtaining quantifiable data from large populations at

reasonable costs, they need to be employed in the right situation. Surveys should be designed from the user perspective meaning short, simple, and clear to the user.

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